



British UFO Research Association

Newchapel Observatory, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire



SCIENCE PAPER 2

Investigation Procedures

Presented by

Trevor Whitaker

at the first

NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATIONS CONFERENCE

STOKE ON TRENT ENGLAND - MAY 1975

Price: Members 30 pence; Non-Members 50 pence

Published: May 1976

I MAKE NO CLAIM TO SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIELD, OR SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS, I WILL USE CERTAIN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM VARIOUS INVESTIGATIONS I HAVE PERSONALLY CARRIED OUT BY OTHER INVESTIGATORS OR OUTSTANDING IN ANY WAY, BUT PURELY BECAUSE THEY ILLUSTRATE SOME POINTS WHICH I WISH TO MAKE.

It is important, to get our priorities right in this subject. It is particularly important for regional co-ordinators, but it does apply more generally to the subject. Dr. Kuettner said we often waste our time on investigations of low priority. The classification of UFO sightings which I prefer is the one by Allan Hynek, and is well known to most people. There are six groups; nocturnal lights, UFOs seen in daytime, radar/visual UFO reports, and types of three close encounters. The first of this latter group, involves sightings only; the second kind some effect on the ground or the witness, and the third kind involve occupants. Dr. Kuettner suggested that future progress in ufology would come from the study of case histories and I suspect he would go even further, to say that in many ways we are wasting our time carrying out investigations in any groups other than five or six.

This has a spin-off problem. If we carry out investigations of only those sort, and ignore completely the other sightings, which would be useful if we are going to carry out statistical analyses, we may probably risk offending some of our sources of information. If we have a person, who is co-operating, all they are interested in is keeping us fed with sighting reports. If we do not appear to be doing anything about them they will fail to produce sighting reports.

GENERATION GAP

I have been conscious for two years at least, since the last regional conference in the north, that we now have a generation gap in Ufology. We have such a wide spread of interest that it is very difficult to slant it towards everyone.

When we go to see a witness, and those of you who have carried out investigations will recognise this immediately, quite often their story is, 'I just happened to look up, or just happened to look out of the window - and there it was.' This means, in the vast majority of cases, that we have a witness who was not expecting to see anything unusual and having seen it, therefore, is not quite sure what he has seen. What I mean here is that the stimulus to vision is through the eyes, but we do not see with the eyes - we see with the brain. This interpretation of what we see is influenced by our experience of what we expect to see. We can be very easily deceived.

So far as I am aware, though we do have reports from time to time, none of us have ever been in the fortunate, or perhaps doubtful, position of being able to investigate a UFO. In fact if you think about it very carefully we are not even investigating a UFO sighting. We are actually investigating, in most cases, the witness of the sighting. It is the witness which is the key to the whole thing. In this sort of situation speed is vital and absolutely essential. Quick contact with the witness and any official bodies which may be involved with a particular sighting.

We can fairly quickly dismiss the official bodies. I do not think we can forget them, but we should be able to deal with them fairly quickly. These are the police, the armed forces, air traffic control, meteorological offices and coastguards. Perhaps we can include here the newspapers, or at least the newspaper reporters. Enquiries made of these people are only fruitful if made within a few days. You cannot expect official bodies to do research for you. You have to make contacts quickly.

FLAMBOROUGH HEAD SIGHTING

The very first sighting investigation I was ever involved in was at Flamborough Head in July 1963. It was a double coincidence. It was around about the time of the Charlton Crater. The reports of the Charlton Crater were followed by reports of craters in other parts of the country, the Lake District, Scotland and Flamborough Head.

The same day that I heard about the crater at Flamborough Head I also heard of a sighting by coastguards there, out at sea. So off I went to investigate both. Now coastguards, you would think, would be difficult people to get at. Well, I walked into the office and said, 'I have heard that your people had seen something out to sea this weekend, was any record of it kept?' They said yes, opened the log and said there is the report. I said thank you, can I make a copy? 'Certainly,' they said, 'Here is a paper and a typewriter.' So we made a copy there and then. If we had chased that up a week later, nobody would have been prepared to look back in their records. We were there fast enough to get the contact we needed.

In 1973 there was a similar incidence which involved the police and army. Police had taken samples of grass and taken away an object found at the alleged site of the incident. By telephoning the local police I managed to speak to the police sergeant involved and get all the information. I was then able to follow it up through the various police departments and get the results of their analysis of the objects found. We did not need their analysis of the soil and grass because we had our own samples and these were analysed.

If you get in soon enough the official bodies will respond. I cannot remember one occasion where there has been official resistance to offering information. They have accepted me at face value and given me all the assistance I needed.

The press also are very helpful, provided the subject is topical. When I ran into problems getting hold of witnesses in one particular sighting in summer 1972 (a possible landing), we were able to have small news items (not adverts) inserted in all the local newspapers in the area asking for witnesses to come forward.

I remember on another occasion I had difficulty contacting witnesses in the Yorkshire Dales. There I came up against a brick wall with the press. The reason was purely delay. They keep cuttings and old copies of papers, but you cannot expect the newspaper to provide one of their staff to do the looking for you. You have to be prepared to do this yourself.

THE INVESTIGATION

As far as the witness is concerned speed is even more important. In fact as soon as your witness speaks to anyone, whether or not they are independent but particularly if they are witnesses themselves, their impressions of what happened or what they say, will begin to become distorted. If you cannot get to them within 24 hours the value of the sighting is immediately halved, and beyond seven days of the sighting the story will have become so enmeshed in the mind that there will almost certainly be distortions. Delays beyond this will not matter, since it will be established with distortions. The longer after the sighting occurs before you can carry out an investigation, the less urgent it becomes.

If you cannot speak to the witness immediately, and it is important to do so, you do not have to actually go and see them. If the witness is on the telephone then as soon as you hear of a sighting, and with an established group (Bufora, Yorkshire Branch) such as ours we do get people ringing or contacting one of our members very quickly (within minutes sometimes). It

is important to tell them (and this was mentioned elsewhere) to sit down and write out everything they can remember as soon as possible. You should also ask them to make drawings of what they think they saw. This is very valuable. If you cannot go to see them immediately, then make them do this at least. It will minimise distortions later on in their minds.

It is important also, if at all possible, not to visit witnesses without an appointment. If they are not on the telephone and you have to get to them immediately then take a sighting report form with you and simply ask them to write down all the things they can remember. I usually ask them to write the story in their own words, forget everything else on the form and that I will come back. Sometimes, if they are close and handy, you can ask them to do this and come back in an hour. That is the ideal situation, in my mind, so that you can get them to write it down at their own speed and in their own time. Many people are quite embarrassed about having to write out a story of an experience while you sit or stand looking over them. They do it far better alone. Mind you, it is also important that they have some sort of time limit in which to do it, because if they do not or are not expecting you back that day or the next, then quite often when you do go back they have not done it or have lost the form.

If it is not possible to return immediately because of the distance, make sure they are expecting you, otherwise you may have a fruitless journey. In our case, in Yorkshire, the boundaries are up to 80 miles and we can travel quite long journeys to see people.

Your approach to a witness is important. If there has been a delay, such as when a report comes to you through the press, then the stories have been generally reported and witnesses may have been badgered by the media in the case of an outstanding report. Also, other UFO societies may have been in touch with them. Now it is something that I have been pressing for for a number of years - to have some form of co-operation between groups. This is why I have always been very much of a pro-Bufora member. I think the ideal situation, if we ever got it, would be for all groups to be under the umbrella of Bufora because this must lead to better co-operation between groups. You would also not get the situation which arises with so many independent groups where the witness gets sick and tired of answering questions. If we have people on whom we can rely, then we can send just one person under the umbrella of another organisation and they can communicate to other interested groups. This is why, in the north, the Northern UFO Network is proving so successful. For those who have not heard of it this is a very loose grouping of several local groups and a Bufora branch, who try to aim for this sort of co-operation.

Witnesses, also, have always had to endure the leg pulls of other acquaintances, when their stories have got out. I always remember the young lady who was responsible for taking the tea round a factory. When her sighting was reported in the local newspapers she got fed up within half an hour, of being talked to about little green men and so on.

They may also receive publications through the post. This is a more serious problem to my mind. For example this horrible thing, *Viewpoint Aquarius*, which I think has frightened more people off Bufora than any other publication. Following its arrival through the letterbox, we have come across households where we have had a great deal of trouble gaining access simply because of it. Rex Dutta's communication lines are quite quick, and indeed it amazes me the speed with which these things sometimes arrive on doorsteps.

When we visit a witness we want to get the maximum factual information possible. Therefore, we have to prove first and foremost that we are serious investigators from an established scientific body, and that we are prepared to listen patiently and without ridicule to whatever the witness has to say. Here, identity cards may help. At least we can prove that we do not belong to these other organisations. Once you have gained access it is important to find out what has happened, and the best way is to talk to the witness in general terms about what has happened. If they have, as I hope, already written out their account of the event, then you can discuss the sighting in general terms. By doing this you can sort out any discrepancies between what they say and what they have written. It is important not to emphasise these discrepancies too much but to slant the questions to try to establish fact from distortion.

It is also important at this stage not to influence the witness by asking leading questions. This is typical of newspaper reporters, of course, when they are preparing their article. They will say to the person, 'What shape was it?' The witness has no idea what shape it was, they cannot remember, so they say that perhaps it was a bit longer than thicker. So it becomes a cigar shape, and in the witness's mind it has probably changed shape already. It is very important not to ask questions in a way that the witness can detect the answers you expect. This is one thing which concerns me. In the field kit it was suggested that we have a card with UFO shapes on. I think we are in danger of influencing the witness to fit his observations into particular patterns.

APPARENT SIZE

I have always taken the view that it is the investigator to complete the specific questions on the sighting account form. It is the investigator who knows what is wanted and the witness, if left to his own devices, will come up with most peculiar answers. This is particularly important in the part referring to size. Three young public schoolgirl ladies who were on holiday in the Lake District who had seen a cigar-shaped object in a vertical position. They sat at a window and watched it for hours on end. We almost prepared the answer for them before they said it. The standard question is, of course, approximately what size it was compared with an object held at arms length. One young lady said a hockey stick! So I brought one, and she was absolutely staggered. It was larger held at arms length than the wall, never mind the window! We established, in the end, that it looked about the size of a chimney seen in the distance. This was about the angular size of an old halfpenny at arms length. This is probably the easiest way to establish size.

Tape recorders, should be kept on the floor or in the bag at this stage. Once you have established contact with the witness and got most of the story, either in general or more specific terms, then, and only then, should you produce a tape recorder and record the story. This may seem very odd, but unless you are very used to talking into a tape record (and 75 per cent of people are not) you become artificial. Even with the most experienced person using a tape recorder they will become more artificial than when talking with people. So I would say keep them out of sight.

It is also important, if at all possible, to visit the site of the event with the witness and examine the actual surroundings. If there is a photograph then, in order to pinpoint points, you want to be able to take a photo with a very similar or better still, the same camera. Then you can compare angular sizes. Again, if there is a photograph, you want to have the negative - so make sure they have it available.

Another thing is to visit the site without the witness, at a similar time of day as the sighting. This may seem a little bit odd, but there are those repeat sightings of which we all should beware. A few years ago I had a report from a lady I knew reasonably well that she had sighted an object every clear night for about two weeks. The lights went out, she drew the curtains, and outside was an object which she described as a spinning top or an upturned umbrella going across the sky perfectly soundless. When this disappeared another similar object appeared going in the opposite direction. Now on the very first bright, clear night after this I went along and parked my car outside this lady's house at the appropriate time. Sure enough, there was the object, an aircraft landing at Yeadon airport. Within a minute or two there was another one went to the south.

This was a lady of 80, who was probably getting a little hard of hearing, and was indoors. These facts are clearest when you visit the site. Go on the same day of the week if possible, because if the object is an aircraft, times vary.

At the end of the investigation do not forget to thank the witnesses. They have given you their time and probably put up with a lot of inconvenience. It has been said that we should also give them the courtesy of an evaluation, though not necessarily there and then. There are those who want to know, and these people should be told. Others are not so concerned. We must deal with each case on its merits.

FOLLOWING UP AN INVESTIGATION

The follow-up is probably the most important thing of all. There may be other witnesses, at least in the more valuable cases, and these have to be seen as soon as possible. Maps of the area have to be drawn, with photographs and sketches. The witness's story has to be studied carefully and then checks made with the other bodies mentioned earlier. You may need details of aircraft, weather balloons or weather conditions. There are sightings where the positioning of the object can be assessed by knowledge of the weather conditions. Meteorological offices can tell you the height of clouds at any time of the day or night. Therefore, if the object is seen just above, below or in the clouds, then you can judge its height. We had a film, a few years ago, taken by a Mr. Huntingdon of Doncaster. It was of an object flying upwards through clouds. We were able to establish its exact height since the clouds were thin and the cloud base could be specified. If written requests are to be sent out to various bodies, it is vital that you enclose a stamped addressed envelope. This does not always guarantee a reply, but at least it is common courtesy and will encourage one.

Allen Hynek has said, 'In our best sightings our follow-up should be as detailed and as thorough as the background follow-up that police undertake in a murder investigation.' I am referring now to the close encounter cases. This is where every facet and every detail has to be examined. You may at this stage find that you have to bring in specialists, and this is where the research department comes in. Do not leave your regional co-ordinators in ignorance of what is happening, because they can probably get a specialist to visit or examine what you have.

With the sighting report form there is of course the investigators report. If anyone has purchased the report based on the ATV film taken near Banbury then this is what I mean. Roger Stanway has admitted at the end that there are still things which should be done, but his is the standard of report which should be produced on the best cases. Perhaps not as thick as his, since it was probably the first of its type, but if any of you have seen

Lumieres Dans La Nuit, or more probably the copies or reprints of their reports in *Flying Saucer Review*, then this is the sort of thing. A report with drawings, sketches, and maps of areas involved. This is the way reports should be produced.

I want to briefly discuss holes and marks in the ground. These of course need special care. If you are fortunate enough to get to the site early enough do not destroy possible evidence. If you have got to talk across it put planks and things down without too much damage. As early as possible photograph, sketch, measure, take casts and samples of damaged grass or soil. If these are moist, seal them in a polythene bag so that they do not dry out. If you have got other equipment then there are other readings to be taken.

I want to encourage your involvement. There are probably things that I have said which need elaborating. There are possibly things which you consider controversial and may disagree with. But I hope that these words will at least stimulate further discussion.

B.U.F.O.R.A. Ltd. publishes a bi-monthly journal
and presents monthly lectures in London, on this
and allied subjects. For further information
ring 01-723-0305 or write the Publicity Secretary:-
Miss C. Henning, 99 Mayday Gardens, London S.E.3.

Editorial office: 99 Mayday Gardens, London S.E.3. Telephone 01-723-0305. Address: 99 Mayday Gardens, London S.E.3. Post Box 12346. Broadcasts: 1234614.

Editor: Mr. Alan Foss, BA, FRAS. Chairman: Miss Anne Harpur. Vice-Chairman: Mr. Alan Foss, BA, FRAS. Secretary: Stephen Smith, MA, LLD, MSc. Treasurer: Richard Scott, MA, FRAS. Hon. Sec.: Mr. Alan Foss, BA, MA, FRAS. Hon. Librarian: Miss Jenny Randles.